

REMARKS

Claims 1, 5, 6, 8-10 and 12-20 have been amended to correct administrative errors and to better define the scope of the invention for reasons unrelated to patentability. Claims 1-21 are pending in this application.

As a preliminary matter, Applicant notes that the PTO-1449 forms attached to Information Disclosure Statements filed on May 15, 2001; Oct. 7, 2002; and Oct. 9, 2003 (duplicate filed on Dec. 16, 2003) have not been initialed and returned by the Examiner. Applicant respectfully requests that the PTO-1449 forms filed with these information Disclosure Statements be initialed and returned by the Examiner with the next communication.

Claims 1, 8, 15 and 21 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Cordery et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,466,921). Claims 2, 3, 5-7, 9, 10, 12-14, 16, 17, 19 and 20 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Cordery et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,466,921) in view of Cordery et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,526,391). Claims 4, 11 and 18 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Cordery et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,466,921) in view of Cordery et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,526,391) and further in view of Wells et al. (U.S. 2001/0032881). Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

The present invention is directed to a mail piece verification system that can help prevent a fraud by duplication, i.e., generating multiple copies of a single postage indicium. The system includes a plurality of postage metering systems for preparing mail pieces, a plurality of mail processing centers for receiving mail pieces and obtaining the respective mail piece data and a data center in operative communication with the plurality of postage metering systems and the plurality of mail processing centers, the data center including a plurality of account files corresponding to the plurality of postage metering systems. The data center stores reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, receives respective mail piece data corresponding to the mail pieces from the plurality of mail processing centers, and uses the respective mail piece data to store empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity

associated with the plurality of postage metering systems. The data center can then conduct a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system. For example, the reset activity data may be used to ascertain an amount of postage that has been purchased by a respective postage metering system over a given time period. The empirical data may be used to ascertain an amount of postage that has been consumed in relation to the given time period. By comparing the purchased postage amount with the consumed postage amount, the propriety of the customer's mailing activity may be established. (Specification, page 13, lines 25-31). For example, if a postage metering system purchased only \$100 worth of postage over a given time period, but the amount of postage consumed during the time period, i.e., the amount of postage on mail pieces that have entered the mail stream for delivery that is associated with that postage metering system, totals more \$100, there is a strong indication of fraud by duplication, i.e., a single postage indicium has been copied onto more than one mail piece.

In view of the above, claim 1 is directed to a mail piece verification system that comprises "a data center in operative communication with a plurality of mail processing centers, the data center including a plurality of account files corresponding to a plurality of postage metering systems; and wherein the data center is for: storing reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; receiving respective mail piece data corresponding to the mail pieces from the plurality of mail processing centers; using the respective mail piece data, storing empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; and conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system."

Cordery et al. '921, in contrast, is directed to a virtual postage metering system that can be used to generate the evidence of postage. In Cordery et al. '921, digital data security for a Data Center of the virtual postage metering system prevents inadvertent and intentional modifications to meter and user data stored at the Data Center. In Cordery et al. '921 security

boxes are used to protect against unauthorized alteration of meter and user records stored at the data center. Cordery et al. '921 also provides secure control of digital token generation process and the associated secure accounting for each postage evidencing transaction occurring at the data center. (Col. 4, lines 14-23).

According to Cordery et al. '921, a system and method of evidencing postage payment provides a secure box that is used to sign the transaction data and to authenticate meter and user records. The system and method include a data center with a database having a plurality of meter records stored therein. Each meter record includes meter information corresponding to a metering account assigned to each of a plurality of remote user devices that are authorized to request evidence of postage payment. When a request for postage is received at the data center, a secure co-processor device in the data center obtains the appropriate meter record and verifies the authenticity of the meter record by verifying a signature in the meter record and comparing freshness data in the meter record to freshness data in the secure device. If verified, the secure device then accounts for an amount of postage to be evidenced, generating evidence of postage payment and updates the meter information, including the freshness data, in the meter record. The secure device then signs the updated meter information and stores the signature in the meter record. The secure device then returns the updated meter record to the database. (Col. 4, lines 43-64).

Thus, Cordery et al. '921 is directed to a virtual postage metering system that allows mailers to use a conventional PC to remotely obtain evidence of postage payment on an as needed basis. The virtual postage metering system does not include any meter hardware at the mailer's site, nor are any funds stored at the mailer's site. All metering and accounting of funds occur at a data center using functional software and database records representing each mailer's "postage meter." (Col. 5, lines 28-38). There is no disclosure, teaching or suggestion in Cordery et al. '921 of a mail piece verification system – the system is Cordery et al. '921 is directed to generating the evidence of postage payment before the mail piece is placed into the mail stream for delivery. This is not the same as verifying the evidence of postage payment.

There is also no disclosure, teaching or suggestion in Cordery et al. '921 of the data center receiving respective mail piece data corresponding to the mail pieces from the plurality of mail processing centers, and using the respective mail piece data, storing empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems as is recited in claim 1. As note above, Cordery et al. '921 is not directed to a verification system that would have access to any empirical data representative of mailing activity, such as, for example, a historical account of observed mailing activity based on the mail pieces that are placed into the mail stream for delivery. The Office Action contends that Col. 8, lines 8-12 of Cordery et al. '921 discloses these features. This is simply not correct. The passage recited by the Office Action from Cordery et al. '921 relates to a transaction request made by a mailer to generate evidence of postage. The mailer has to be authenticated based on records corresponding to the meter account of the mailer initiating the request. Once the mailer has been authenticated, the appropriate meter record can be communicated to the meter box which verifies a signature and freshness data for the record. The meter box then can perform the accounting functions, generate a token for the requested transaction, and generate data for an indicium. Thus, while the system in Cordery et al. '921 will know how much postage was actually purchased by a mailer, there is no disclosure, teaching or suggestion in the system of Cordery et al. '921 of storing empirical data representative of mailing activity as in the present invention.

There is also no disclosure, teaching or suggestion in Cordery et al. '921 of the data center conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the rest postage data associated with a selected postage metering system as is recited in claim 1, since as noted above, the system in Cordery et al. '921 does not have any access to any type of empirical data representative of mailing activity. As noted above, a forensic accounting analysis could be, for example, comparing the purchased postage amount with the consumed postage amount. The system in Cordery et al. '921 has no way of knowing the consumed postage amount, and therefore cannot perform any such analysis.

For at least the above reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that claim 1 is allowable over the prior art of record.

Each of independent claims 8 and 15 include limitations substantially similar to those of claim 1. For the same reasons claim 1 is allowable, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 8 and 15 are allowable over the prior art of record.

Each of the remaining claims are dependent on one of claims 1, 8 or 15, and therefore include the limitation of the independent claims. The references to Cordery et al. '391 and Wells do not overcome the above deficiencies. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 2-7, 9-14 and 16-20, dependent upon claims 1, 8 and 15, respectively, are allowable along with claims 1, 8 and 15 and on their own merits.

Claim 21 is directed to a data structure that comprises "a plurality of account files corresponding to a plurality of postage metering system, each of the plurality of account files including: a serial number identifying a respective one of the plurality of postage metering systems; reset data representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; and empirical data in each of the plurality of account fields representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively."

As noted above with respect to claim 1, there is no disclosure, teaching or suggestion in Cordery et al. '921 of empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems as is recited in claim 21. As noted above, Cordery et al. '921 is not directed to a verification system that would have access to any empirical data representative of mailing activity, such as, for example, a historical account of observed mailing activity based on the mail pieces that are placed into the mail stream for delivery. The Office Action contends that Col. 4, lines 24-32 of Cordery et al. '921 discloses this feature. This is not correct.

The passage cited by the Office Action is reproduced below.

Security issues for the virtual postage metering system include user authentication, financial and postage transactions, and meter records. For the user authentication and meter records, the database hold encryption keys in cipher text and not in plain text. For each transaction, all data, including a time stamp or sequence number, used to complete the transaction are digitally signed and the signature is stored as part of the updated transaction record. It has been found that maintaining transaction records in this manner prevents inadvertent modification of the records.

Each of the features described in this passage relate to a postage metering system that generates postage. Cordery et al. '921 is not directed to a verification system that would have access to any empirical data representative of mailing activity, such as, for example, a historical account of observed mailing activity based on the mail pieces that are placed into the mail stream for delivery. There is simply no disclosure, teaching or suggestion anywhere in this passage, or anywhere else, in Cordery et al. '921 of empirical data representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems as is recited in claim 21.

For at least the above reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that claim 21 is allowable over the prior art of record.

In view of the foregoing remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the pending claims are in a condition for allowance and favorable action thereon is requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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